

How Greta Garbo Eclipsed the Nine Men Who Heard Her Say, "I Love You"



She helped him to the top . . . Robert Montgomery, who achieved stardom soon after appearing opposite Greta Garbo in "Inspiration."



A scene from Garbo's first American picture, "The Torrent," with Ricardo Cortez . . . who is coming back after a descent into oblivion.



A scene from "Wild Orchids," in which Nils Asther was Garbo's leading man.

By DAN THOMAS

SINCE the day six years ago when Greta Garbo arrived in Hollywood wearing a checkered suit and possessing a very scanty English vocabulary, nine men have heard her say "I love you."

Eight of these men heard her say these words only to the accompaniment of grinding cameras and glaring studio lights. Only one, John Gilbert, ever heard them off-stage. But all nine have had diverse adventures since they played opposite the exotic Swedish actress.

The nine can be grouped into three classes. The early ones were chosen to lend their prestige to the building of a new star. They were famous when she was unknown—although today she outshines them all.

In the middle group were actors who traveled along with her on an equal plane, rising with her. And the third group is made up of newcomers to whom playing opposite Garbo was an important step upward in their screen careers.

Of the nine, only two or three have any great popularity in the movies today. Garbo has kept steadily on her course, eclipsing them all. And Hollywood, to this day, does not quite understand how she did it.

Ricardo Cortez holds the distinction of playing opposite the Swedish actress in her first American picture, "The Torrent," made six years ago when he was at the peak of his success.

Cortez was a veteran on the screen at that time. He had made love to filmland's loveliest girls and was tremendously popular. Studio executives chose him because they knew that even should Greta fail to "click" with American audiences, his name would put the film over.

IN those days Greta was very young and somewhat bewildered by the glamour of Hollywood. But even in that state she managed to match the Cortez suavity with a sophisticated grace even greater than his. That first picture, "The Torrent," removed all doubt as to how America would receive this newcomer from across the Atlantic. She was an instant hit.

A few months later Garbo began work on "The Temptress." Since the Latin-Swedish combination had been so successful in her first film, Antonio Moreno was selected as her leading man for her second appearance on the silver screen. Although possessing an entirely different personality, Moreno was, like Cortez, one of the most popular male stars in movieland at that time.

These men, Cortez and Moreno, served to introduce Garbo. Their names meant more than hers and their swarthy contrasted beautifully with the Garbo whiteness. They paved the way for John Gilbert.

The teaming of Gilbert and Garbo for "Flesh and the Devil" served to introduce one of the most fascinating romantic teams ever seen on the American screen.

Gilbert then was virtually sitting on top of the cinema world. He still was riding the wave which started with "The Big Parade." But he relinquished his rights to individual stardom in order to be co-starred with the Swedish

Kisses from screenland's famous lovers helped make her a star, but now conditions are changed and she brings fame to the lucky men who are chosen to play opposite her



Greta Garbo and Antonio Moreno in "The Temptress," her second American picture. . . . While Garbo went up, Moreno dropped.



Gavin Gordon and Greta Garbo in "Romance" . . . which helped Gordon up the ladder.

actress of whom he knew little, but who intrigued him considerably.

"Flesh and the Devil" was a sensational hit at the box office. It completed the build-up necessary to make Garbo and Gilbert two of the biggest stars in the history of motion pictures. Everyone talked about the love scenes in this film. Garbo had displayed emotion before, but never anything that compared to her passion for Gilbert.

IT was not long before Greta scarcely ever was seen outside of the studio except when accompanied by Gilbert. He was the only one, before or since, who was able to pull her out of the seclusion which has made her the most mysterious of our screen personages. For months this romance flourished and was talked about more than any other movie romance.

Some months after "Flesh and the Devil" was finished and while the Gilbert-Garbo romance was sizzling hot, they were teamed again in "Love," a picture designed to capitalize on their private love affair—which wasn't so very private. By that time all Hollywood was wondering when the couple would be married.

Then, for some reason never explained, the fireworks commenced. And less than a month later Gilbert and Ina Claire skipped off to Nevada and were married without anyone knowing that they were more than casual friends.

But they never lived together very long. Ina returned to New York and the legitimate stage shortly afterwards

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and when she returned to Hollywood she took up a separate residence—after startling nearly everyone by announcing that she would rather have Gilbert as a lover than as a husband. And it is said that Jack's only love is for Garbo.

Following her vacation—given to her after each picture—after "Love," Garbo started production on "The Divine Woman." Gilbert still was her sweetheart in private life. But studio executives picked Lars Hansen, who had played an important role in "Flesh and the Devil," for her screen lover in this film.

THEN came Conrad Nagel, popular and a perfect foil for the Garbo wiles. He was the leading man in "The Mysterious Lady." Nagel was still a different type than any leading man Greta ever had had, having more of the solid business man characteristics.

After Nagel came another fellow countryman, Nils Asther. He came from Greta's own city, Stockholm. These two were so well matched in "The Single Standard" that Asther again was cast opposite Garbo in "Wild Orchids."

Asther was just getting his start in the cinema world. He was absolutely an unknown quantity when he stepped into "The Single Standard." But after completing two films with the great Garbo he found himself high on the



When the screen's most famous romance was hitting on all six. . . . John Gilbert and Greta Garbo in "Flesh and the Devil."

ladder of cinema fame, popular and affluent.

At this time Gilbert stepped back into the picture again. Studio executives had found it more profitable to star these two independently, as their combined salaries placed a terrific load on any one picture. However, they were brought together again for "A Woman of Affairs."

This move, it would seem, was an unfortunate one as the picture fell far below the standard set by their two previous productions, thereby robbing the fans of some of the illusions they had treasured.

The talkies finally took complete possession of Hollywood. Garbo had to make a talkie. Nor was she unwilling to do so. She had been studying faithfully and while she had not rid herself of her accent, she could speak fairly distinctly. And her voice, naturally low, was found to record remarkably well.

Charles Bickford, homely, red-headed and one of the new arrivals from Broadway's legitimate stage, was picked to play opposite the Swedish star in this production. Bickford brought to Garbo's first talkie, "Anna Christie," a ruggedness never before seen in a Garbo film. And he rose to sudden popularity along with Garbo's increased popularity.

GAVIN GORDON, another

importation from the stage, came next as the minister lover in "Romance." At the time he was entirely new as far as screen audiences were concerned. The one picture with Garbo lifted him temporarily into the spotlight and then he disappeared as quietly as he had come, to be forgotten by the fans.

Then came the last of the nine leading men this great actress has had during her career in the United States, young and handsome Robert Montgomery. Bob had been in pictures for just about a year when he was given his assignment opposite Greta. The Garbo film, "Inspiration," completed his "build-up."

And what of the nine lucky men who played opposite her? What happened to them? Cortez sank from sight. For nearly two years nobody would give him a job. About a year ago he began to come back. One picture was good. Another followed that and Cortez began an ascension that has carried him almost to the position he held once before.

Antonio Moreno has practically disappeared from the screen. One of the nine, Lars Hansen, is dead.

John Gilbert was well on the road to oblivion as a result of the talkies. But he has staged a comeback in his last two films which probably will keep him in the running for some time yet. Conrad Nagel never has attained stardom, but he has maintained a steady pace.

Asther, like Gilbert, nearly lost out when the talkies came in. M-G-M released him from his contract and all other studios were "cold" on him. But a few months ago he was signed again and now shows promise of staging a comeback. Charles Bickford, still a beginner when he was with Garbo, has steadily advanced. Gavin Gordon still is working, but seldom is heard of. Montgomery has forged steadily ahead and now is enjoying stardom.